

American

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United States Seeks Deeper Ties with Asia-Pacific

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States will continue to deepen its strong economic and strategic partnership with the Asia-Pacific region, while Asia has a strong interest in the United States remaining a dynamic partner and stabilizing influence, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says.

“The Asia-Pacific region is a fulcrum of global politics and economics. It is central to solving many challenges we face,” Clinton said in a speech January 12 at the East-West Center in Honolulu. “Asian nations are helping to prevent nuclear proliferation in Iran, build schools and clinics in Afghanistan, keep peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and combat piracy off the Horn of Africa.”

The new landscape in Asia requires the United States to build an institutional architecture that maximizes the prospects for effective cooperation, builds trust and reduces the friction of competition, she said. That includes active participation in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and other regional and sub-regional groups, she said.

Clinton is on a 10-day trip that will take her to Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, after her stop in Hawaii for the speech and a one-on-one meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada. The trip is intended to illustrate the emphasis President Obama places on strong ties to key allies such as Japan and Australia, and that the United States is not a visiting partner to the region, but a resident partner in the region.

Clinton outlined five principles that will guide the United States’ continued multilateral engagement and leadership in the region. The first is that the “United States’ alliance relationships are the cornerstone of our regional involvement.” She said the security and stability provided through these relationships have been critical to the region’s success and development.

The second principle is that regional institutions should work to advance clear and increasingly shared objectives, she said. These shared objectives include economic opportunity and growth, and fostering democracy and human rights, she added.

“To promote regional security, we must address nuclear proliferation, territorial disputes and military competition — persistent threats of the 21st century,” Clinton said.

Advancing economic opportunity, she said, means focusing on lowering trade and investment barriers, improving market openness, and promoting balanced, inclusive and sustainable patterns of economic growth. These are among the goals outlined by the United States and its partners in the Group of 20 advanced and emerging economies in two summits last year, and were featured in the recent meeting of APEC.

The third principle requires the institutions of the region to be focused on delivering results. “The formation and operation of regional groups should be motivated by concrete, pragmatic considerations,” she said. “It’s more important to have organizations that produce results, rather than simply producing new organizations.”

And fourth, Clinton said, the United States and its Asia-Pacific partners must enhance their flexibility in pursuing results, which may mean informal arrangements targeted to specific challenges, such as efforts by the Six-Party Talks that seek to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. The Six-Party Talks include China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia and the United States.

Finally, she said that as Asia-Pacific nations, “we need to decide ... which will be the defining regional institutions to best protect and promote our collective future.” While each organization has its purpose, each also has varying degrees of importance in the regional architecture. The most likely mix is of well-established and new organizations, Clinton said.

United States, Allies Exploring Further Sanctions Against Iran

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States believes that the most effective way to convince Iran to abandon nuclear weapons efforts is to impose highly targeted sanctions against the Iranian leadership’s political and commercial base.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told reporters January 11 who were accompanying her on a 10-day trip to the Asia-Pacific region that the six nations actively engaged in talks tentatively are set to meet about January 16 in New York to explore the kind and degree of sanctions that will best suit the emerging situation.

The six nations include the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council — China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States — plus Germany, which are known as the P5+1 group. Their primary objective has been to convince Iran to halt its uranium

enrichment program, which is considered by weapons experts to be an essential preliminary step in the development of a nuclear weapon. Western nations believe that if Iran were to develop even a limited nuclear weapons capability, it would have far-reaching security concerns for the Gulf and the greater Middle East, especially if it is accompanied by the development of a medium- to long-range missile.

"It is clear that there is a relatively small group of decisionmakers inside Iran. They are in both political and commercial relationships, and if we can create a sanctions track that targets those who actually make the decisions, we think that is a smarter way to do sanctions," Clinton told reporters on a flight to Hawaii, according to published news reports.

Clinton left Washington January 11 on a 10-day trip scheduled to take her to Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea with a stop in Hawaii. In Honolulu, Clinton will meet with Japanese Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada and make a major policy speech on U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific region.

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley told reporters at a daily briefing January 11 that Under Secretary of State William Burns is traveling to Moscow and to Madrid this week for talks with the six nations as well as talks with members of the European Union.

"There may well be a P5+1 meeting coming up in the very near future. ... It could be part of this trip," Crowley added.

Diplomatic engagement has been a central tenet of President Obama in his approach to Iran, and Clinton has said repeatedly that every effort is being made to keep talks going.

"We want to keep the door to dialogue open," Clinton said recently though adding that "we can't continue to wait and we cannot continue to stand by."

Clinton told reporters that the United States has been evaluating ideas from a broad range of other countries — identifying what works, what won't work, and what would have the most impact on changing the strategic calculation inside Iran's leadership.

The United States is backing a proposal offered by the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ship low-grade nuclear fuel abroad for further enrichment and return for use in a Tehran medical research reactor. Clinton said this approach offers the best way to handle the needs of Iran and to build confidence that its efforts are not aimed at building a nuclear weapon.

SANCTIONS IMPOSED

Since 2006, the U.N. Security Council has imposed three sets of sanctions that are still in effect. The first set concerns sensitive nuclear materials and froze the assets of individual Iranians and some companies. The second set included new arms and financial sanctions, and the third set added further travel and financial sanctions.

The United States shut out Iran's Bank Saderat from the U.S. financial system in September 2006. It did the same thing to Bank Melli and Bank Mellat in October 2007. The United States has also sanctioned Iran's Revolutionary Guard, which controls the nuclear development program. And the U.S. Congress is considering legislation that would require more and deeper sanctions.

The European Union has imposed visa bans on senior Iranian officials and its top nuclear and ballistics experts. Britain froze more than \$1.6 billion in Iranian assets under EU- and U.N.-imposed sanctions. Britain has also frozen business ties with Bank Mellat and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Announces \$20 Million for Afghanistan

Washington — Recognizing the urgent need to create jobs in Afghanistan's agricultural sector to boost food production and draw insurgents off the battlefield, the United States announced January 12 a \$20 million plan to support Afghanistan's agricultural economy.

"After decades of conflict, Afghanistan lacks many of the personnel and knowledge resources needed to deliver much-needed services to its people, more than 80 percent of whom rely on agriculture for wages and sustenance. Today's commitment with [Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock] will help Afghanistan's government build critical capacity at the local level in agricultural extension and expertise," U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in Kabul, Afghanistan.

"The United States recognizes the importance of Afghanistan's agricultural economy in creating jobs, helping the nation achieve food self-sufficiency, and drawing insurgents off of the battlefield," Vilsack said.

Vilsack met with Asif Rahimi, Afghanistan's minister of agriculture, irrigation and livestock, to advise him of the availability of up to \$20 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) if the Afghan agency establishes reconstruction goals aimed at boosting agricultural productivity, rebuilding agribusiness,

improving irrigation, creating jobs and enhancing technologies. The funding, Vilsack said, is not guaranteed, and the ministry must continue to demonstrate its commitment to transparency.

“USDA experts will partner with Afghan ministry experts, local officials and entrepreneurs — partnerships critical to success,” U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry said. “We will also ensure that our efforts are aligned with the National Agricultural Development Framework outlined by Minister Rahimi, and also with Afghanistan’s National Development Strategy.”

While in Afghanistan, Vilsack traveled to Helmand province, in which more than half of the country’s poppy crop is grown, to discuss efforts to educate and assist farmers in the province. In the last year, efforts have helped farmers move 33 percent of the province’s hectares from poppy cultivation to legal crops.

In December 2009, President Obama outlined his strategy to disrupt, dismantle and eventually defeat al-Qaida and prevent its return to either Afghanistan or Pakistan. Along with an infusion of troops was an increase in the number of civilian technical experts deployed to Afghanistan, including more than 50 USDA agricultural experts.

Since 2003, USDA has deployed 94 people for medium- and long-term assignments in Afghanistan and provided roughly \$229 million in food aid to the country. Agricultural experts work with Afghans through a variety of activities meant to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan government, rebuild agricultural markets and improve management of natural resources. USDA projects have included installing windmills to pump water for irrigation and livestock, training veterinarians to detect and treat parasites, rehabilitating a university’s agricultural research laboratory, stabilizing eroded river banks and irrigation canals, developing crop storage facilities, rehabilitating degraded orchards, mentoring provincial directors of agriculture to help them improve their services to farmers, and reforestation, according to the Agriculture Department.

USDA also manages programs that train Afghan agricultural officials and professionals in the United States. USDA-led programs such as the Cochran Fellowship Program, the Norman E. Borlaug International Agricultural Science and Technology Fellows Program, and the Faculty Exchange Program have brought 50 Afghans to the United States since 2004 for specialized training lasting from two weeks to five months. These public- and private-sector policymakers, scientists and academics have upgraded their technical skills in a wide range of topics and then shared this knowledge with their students and colleagues in Afghanistan, according to the

Agriculture Department.

U.S. Partners to Address Water Scarcity in the Middle East

Local efforts key to adapting to climate change

By Carrie Loewenthal Massey
Special Correspondent

Washington — Climate change may provoke fears of melting polar ice caps and rising sea levels, threatening to drown entire countries, but for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), it also brings an opposite worry: water scarcity.

Consistently lower levels of rainfall, a result of climate change, have left Arab states with water shortfalls. Only Egypt and Lebanon still have enough water, while Yemen faces the direst shortage.

During the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (COP-15) December 7-18, 2009, the United States pledged to assist developing countries with local efforts to adapt to climate change. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton relayed the United States’ intention to partner with other developed countries to raise \$100 billion per year to help developing countries address climate-change needs.

“A hundred billion dollars a year is a lot of money. That’s a commitment that is very real and can have tangible effects,” Clinton said.

“Tangible effects” are crucial in the face of water scarcity.

America’s partnerships in the MENA region on water-related issues exemplify the type of relief to which the new global fund for developing countries announced at COP-15 can contribute. In recent years, the U.S. government has worked with Yemen, Jordan and Morocco to help secure and conserve water resources.

Yemen. In the Yemeni village of Thula, USAID helped renovate a 700-year-old cistern that held the main water supply for the community. Water in the cistern had become contaminated by pollutants and needed improved filtration. Workers collaborated with local leaders to use traditional methods and natural stone materials in the renovation process to honor the history of the cistern, as well as to educate the public on keeping the cistern clean and well-maintained.

Jordan. To ensure enough clean water flows to the population of Amman, Jordan, the U.S. government funds projects to increase sustainable access to safe drinking water. The Zara-Ma’in Treatment Plant funded by USAID

captures water from streams and removes contaminants and salt for the water to be distributed to 700,000 people. The ability to purify the salt water allows the country to increase its water supply and takes stress off of groundwater aquifers, allowing them to retain their capacity as reserves. The project created 1,500 construction jobs and 100 permanent jobs for Jordanians to run the operation.

America also assisted in the rehabilitation of water distribution networks in Amman and Aqaba to reduce water loss. By partnering with community-based organizations, USAID distributed 135 small grants to implement water saving and efficiency projects that benefited 2,600 households in underprivileged areas in Jordan. This included introducing a home-based water harvesting and storage system in rural areas that remain underserved by the public water distribution system. Following installation, these systems become the primary source of water for households and significantly contribute to water security for rural Jordanians. While there was an initial cost to install these systems, the costs of maintaining them are low.

Jordan's overall water supply will increase by using recycled, treated wastewater (known as reclaimed water). Improvements in wastewater infrastructure focus on reusing treated wastewater in agriculture and industry. In one example, USAID piloted a program to work with Jordanian farmers to safely irrigate their crops with reclaimed water, and is currently working with industries on how to conserve both water and energy in their production processes.

In the coming years, the U.S. government will partner with Jordan to develop water management practices and approaches both at the national, decisionmaker and community grass-roots level. This will include conducting public information campaigns on conserving water, continuing to improve cost recovery, and updating water policies to promote water conservation and water usage efficiency.

Morocco. In Morocco, three pilot projects have helped demonstrate economically beneficial methods of efficiently managing scarce water supplies. In Dokkarat (Fez region) a chromium-recovery plant now recycles chromium that tanneries were directly dumping into the Sebou River. The plant helped reduce the contamination of river waters and harm to its fauna and flora while the tanneries can now buy back and reuse the chromium.

A wastewater-treatment plant in Drarga, southern Morocco, now cleans a contaminated aquifer, from which farmers can purchase compost and treated water for irrigation. American assistance helped make this treatment plant a reality.

USAID also helped local growers by introducing innovative farming and irrigation techniques to help prevent soil erosion and early silting of a reservoir near Tetouan, northern Morocco.

Along with USAID, the World Bank — to which the United States is a contributor — funds many water sustainability and irrigation initiatives in the MENA region. The World Bank cites drought, heat waves, worsening air quality and sea surges in low-lying coastal areas as other climate change effects with which MENA countries must contend.

SEIZING ALTERNATIVE ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES IN MENA REGION

In addition to environmental hardships, MENA countries face a common global challenge as a result of climate change: developing alternative, clean energy sources. Several countries, including Egypt, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates, have already begun investing in wind and solar energy projects, according to The National, an Abu Dhabi-based newspaper.

In fact, Morocco projects to generate 2,000 megawatts of electricity from solar energy by the year 2020. The project is expected to save the equivalent of 1 million metric tons of fossil fuel a year and prevent the emission of several million tons of CO₂.

Addressing the same challenge of moving away from fossil fuels, President Obama in his December 18, 2009, speech at COP-15 detailed the United States' responsibility to adapt to and mitigate climate change. He outlined the country's commitment to promoting environmental improvement "by making historic investments in renewable energy; by putting our people to work increasing efficiency in our homes and buildings; and by pursuing comprehensive legislation to transform to a clean energy economy." These efforts go hand in hand with "financing that helps developing countries adapt," Obama said.

Through funding and collaboration, the United States, MENA and the global community can together combat climate change, an effort Obama called "a historic endeavor — one that makes life better for our children and our grandchildren."

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